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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the influence of various information sources on graduate students' communicative, social, and academic expectations. Specifically, the study examined whether (1) those students who received preentry information about a university from an informal source would perceive that more of their expectations were met than would those who received information from a formal source, (2) those students who received previous degrees from similar universities would perceive that more of the expectations were met than would those who received degrees from dissimilar universities, and (3) those students who, prior to enrolling, examined and evaluated alternative universities would perceive that more of their expectations were met than would those who did not do so. Subjects, 72 black graduate students, completed a 12-item questionnaire that elicited information concerning sources that had influenced them in choosing a university, preentry expectations, postentry perceptions, previous universities attended, and their decision making processes. Results indicated that sources of information, similarity of institution attended, and examination of alternative universities were not important as determinants of the degree to which expectations were perceived to have been met. (FL)

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A Study of Communication Expectations of Black Graduate Students at a State University

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A Study of Communication Expectations of Black Graduate Students at a State University

Abstract

This is a data-based study which focuses on the influence of various information sources and the extent to which communicative, social, and academic expectations are met in a state university. Even though previous research has examined information sources and expectations, none has focused specifically on the black graduate student in a university setting. More specifically, it is hypothesized that: (1)those students who received pre-entry information about the university from an informal source will perceive that more of their expectations were met than those students who received pre-entry information from a formal source; (2)those students who received previous degrees from similar universities will perceive that more of their expectations were met than those students who received degrees from dissimilar institutions; and (3) those students who, prior to actually enrolling in the university, examined and evaluated alternative universities, will perceive that more of their expectations were met than those students who did not do so in the decision-making process. The first, second, and third hypotheses were rejected.

A Study of Communication Expectations of Black Graduate Students at a State University

In recent years, minority retention, like minority recruitment, has become an area of concern for many university officials. While in some cases, the retention of minorities in institutions of higher learning has actually become a significant problem, it remains an important concern in other cases (Brown, 1981). Regardless, however, of whether it is simply a concern or a problem, this issue has commanded and has received the attention of numerous parties. Consequently, various committees have been formed, and studies and surveys are being conducted to investigate the issue of minority retention at the university level. Although it is possible to analyze minority retention from a number of perspectives, the communicative approach is of primary concern in this paper.

A communicative analysis of minority retention requires that one examine such variables as information sources, pre-entry expectations, post-entry experiences, and decision-making processes of minority students at the university level. Essentially, those students who enter the university must undergo a type of organizational socialization which is, in fact, a communication process. Organizational socialization can be examined in terms of at least three major phases: the anticipatory socialization or pre-arrival stage, the encounter stage, and the metamorphosis stage (Van Maanen, 1975). It is the first and second of these phases about which this study revolves. The first phase, anticipatory socialization (Feldman, 1976) or pre-arrival (Porter, Lawler, and Hackman, 1975),

forms an integral part of orgarizational entry and is followed by the encounter phase (Porter, Lawler, and Hackman, 1975). Anticipatory socialization includes all learning which occurs before the recruit actually becomes a part of the organization (Feldman, 1976; Van Maanen, 1975; Brim and Wheeler, 1966); the encounter stage, on the other hand, refers to that period when the recruit actually enters the organization. It is during the latter phase that the individual actually has the opportunity to experience the organization firsthand and to match his pre-entry expectations of the organization with his post-entry experiences.

There are two variables which affect a newcomer's progress through these socialization stages: realism and congruence (Feldman, 1976). If both of these variables are present, the process will occur with a minimum of problems; if they are not, it is likely to be a long and difficult process. Realism refers to the extent to which the person has full and accurate information about the processes which occur in the organization. This realism might be achieved in part through the use of seven major criteria in making decisions (Janis and Mann, 1977). More specifically, the newcomer, in making his decision to enter the organization, ideally:

1. thoroughly canvasses a wide range of alternative courses of action;
2. surveys the full range of objectives to be fulfilled and the values implicated by the choice;
3. carefully weighs whatever he knows about the costs and risks of negative consequences as well as the positive consequences, that could flow from each alternative;

4. intensively searches for new information relevant to further evaluation of the alternatives;
5. correctly assimilates and takes account of any new information or expert judgment to which he is exposed, even when the information or judgment does not support the course of action he initially prefers;
6. reexamines the positive and negative consequences of all known alternatives, including those originally regarded as unacceptable, before making a final choice;
7. makes detailed provisions for implementing or executing the chosen course of action, with special attention to contingency plans that might be required if various known risks were to materialize.

Congruence, on the other hand, refers to the extent to which the individual's needs and skills and the organization's resources are matched (Feldman, 1976). Thus, to the extent that these variables are present, the individual will experience higher role satisfaction (Wanous, 1980; Wanous, 1978), and will proceed through the encounter phase with ease.

An examination of previous research on the presence of unrealistic expectations reveals that studies have been conducted in a variety of disciplines and settings. For example, research which has been done on initial expectations of organizational communication climates reveals that to a limited degree, workers who had previously worked another job, had exaggerated perceptions of their prior jobs which might have served as a "source for their inflated expectations of the communication climates of their new

organizations" (Jablin, 1981). As a result of large discrepancies between expectations and reality regarding the communication system in the new organization, those newcomers with inflated communication climate expectations have been found to have a higher probability of job turnover and/or less job satisfaction (Jablin, 1979; Jablin, 1981).

Other studies of the discrepancy between pre-entry expectations and post-entry experiences have been done at the American Telephone and Telegraph Company (Bray, Campbell, and Grant, 1974) and at the Ford Motor Company (Dunnette, Arvey, and Banas, 1973), and have revealed, in the words of Dunnette, Arvey, and Banas that "high turnover among college graduate employees is related significantly to the sharp discrepancies seen by many of them between their actual job experiences and their hopes and expectations at the time they agreed to join the company"(1973). Not only however, has this discrepancy been shown to exist in the work situation, but in the military (Wiskoff, 1977) and in educational institutions (Wanous, 1976) as well. Interestingly enough, Wanous, studying students as outsiders during the summer before their entry into graduate business school, as newcomers during the fall of the first year, and as insiders at the end of the spring term, concluded:

> Outsider expectations did turn out to be inflated relative to the more realistic beliefs of insiders, but the decline appears to be somewhat selective. Those expectations concerning intrinsic job or organizational characteristics declined significantly with entry, but not those referring to extrinsic factors. Perhaps, this

> difference can be explained by the 'concreteness' of various perceptions. For example, it is probably much easier for a student to validate an expectation about tuition than it would be, for factors such as the quality of teaching, chances for personal growth, and so forth. (1976)

Thus, Wanous acknowledges the existence of unrealistic as well as realistic expectations.

This study proposes to apply this notion of inflated expectations to the issue of minority retention at the university level. Although the Wanous study (1976) does revolve around educational institutions as this study does, the present study is, in essence, an extension of the prior one since it attempts to focus specifically on the black grduate student in a university setting. More specifically, this study will consider the following hypotheses:

1. Those students who received pre-entry information about the university from an informal source will perceive that more of their expectations were met than those students who received pre-entry information from a formal source. Obviously, realistic expectations can serve to reduce voluntary resignations for three reasons (Ilgen and Seely, 1974):

   a. Based upon realistic information, some applicants may decide not to join the organization.
   b. The applicant's possession of accurate information prior to making a decision to accept or reject the position may lead to a greater felt responsibility

for the decision and a greater commitment to the decision.

c. Knowledge of what to expect from the situation may better prepare individuals to cope with it, and thus reduce frustration.

Essentially, "when the decision maker is psychologically prepared for a setback that materializes, he presumably can recover more quickly from the initial shock" (Janis and Mann, 1977). The use of a realistic source of information is also supported by Weitz (1956) who, in his study involving insurance company employees, suggested that this information should, in fact, come from an "executive" source. It is however, Wanous (1973, 1975, 1980) who truly advances the idea of the realistic job preview. He maintains, for example, based on his field experiment involving female telephone operators (Wanous, 1973) that such a preview results in more realistic expectations, fewer thoughts of quitting, and slightly higher job survival.

One could also argue that an already employed organizational member, in addition to films and booklets (Wanous, 1975), might also serve as a reliable and realistic source of information. In fact, studies reveal that those organizational members who are referred through informal channels (e.g. recommended by friends, relatives, or other employees) tend to remain with the organization longer than those members recruited through formal means (Decker and Cornelius, 1979; Reid, 1972; Gannon, 1971). Perhaps, as Decker and Cornelius (1979) speculate:

It may be that employee referrals simply have more accurate information available to them about their potential

> jobs. Applicants referred from employment agencies and newspaper advertisements, on the other hand, may tend to get only positive information about the job and hence receive a less realistic picture of the job and the organization.

Therefore, if an organizational member, or in this case, an actual student, is likely to present a realistic preview (negative and positive information), those students who received pre-entry information about the university from such an informal source will perceive that more of their expectations were met than those students who received pre-entry information from a formal source.

2. Those students who received previous degrees from similar universities will perceive that more of their expectations were met than those students who received degrees from dissimilar institutions. The study on the Ford Motor Company (Dunnette, Arvey, and Banas, 1973) reveals that the greatest disenchantment among the college graduates was related to the first job assignment in the company. Subsequent jobs in the company, it seems, are more satisfying, and Wanous (1980) offers two explanations for this. First, people are frequently able to switch to jobs which are closer to their expectations, and second, experience as insiders teaches people what to expect. Thus, similar experiences in organizations are likely to lead to less post-decision dissonance.

This would seem to indicate that a student who had graduated from an educational institution which was similar to the present one in size, could expect, in light of past experiences, to find a number of familiar experiences.

3. Those students who, prior to actually enrolling in the university, examined and evaluated alternative universities, will perceive that more of their expectations were met than those students who did not do so in the decision making process. More specifically, research indicates that those individuals who examined information about various universities thoroughly and who weighed tradeoffs involved in attending various universities as part of decision making (Janis and Mann, 1977) should have a more realistic picture of the organization as a result. Consequently, a higher level of the individuals' expectations is likely to be met.

METHOD

Subjects

This field study involved 72 black students enrolled in graduate school at a southwestern university. This sample can be characterized as follows: (1)21 had been enrolled one year or less, 42 for two to four years, and 9 for five years or more; (2)38 were enrolled in the M.A. program and 34 in the Ph.D. program; and (3)50 were taking coursework while the remaining 22 were either writing theses or dissertations.[1] In summary, 58% of those interviewed had been enrolled at the university between two and four years, the sample was composed almost equally of M.A. and Ph.D. students, and 69% of the students were in the course-work stage of their programs.

Procedures

During the Spring, 1982, a twelve-item questionnaire was employed to interview the subjects by telephone. The researcher, prior to actually asking the questions in each of the 10 to 20 minute interviews, introduced herself by name, indicating that she

too was a black graduate student, and explained the purpose of the study. Once the interview was completed, the researcher thanked each student for his time.

Measures

The twelve-item questionnaire was designed to gather information concerning influential sources of information about the university, pre-entry expectations, post-entry perceptions, previous universities attended, and decision-making processes as well as demographic data. More specifically, of the twelve items, two were 5-point Likert type scales.[2] One of these scales measured the degree to which initial expectations coincided with present expectations, and the second measured the degree to which the university accurately presented itself to potential students. The remaining items were open and close-ended questions. These remaining questions can be characterized as follows: (1)open-ended questions which requested that the students indicate sources of information about the university, major influences in the decision to attend the university, pre-entry expectations, tenure, and previous universities from which students had graduated; and (2)bipolar questions which requested that the students indicate whethere they were in the M.A. or Ph.D. program, whether they were in the coursework or thesis/dissertation stage of the program, whether they gathered information about other universities prior to entering this university, whether they weighed tradeoffs, and finally, whether they were happy or unhappy at the university. It should be noted that some of the questionnaire items were retrospective in nature, and thus, may potentially limit the implications of the study.

Data Analysis

The data were placed into contingency tables for analysis, and were tested using chi-square tests of independence.

For the first hypothesis, a chi-square test of independence for a 4x5 (4 levels of met expectations by 5 levels of information sources) contingency table was employed. For this analysis, four "met expectation" groups were formed thus: (1)very similar, (2)similar, (3)moderately similar, and (4)dissimilar. The five types of information sources were: (1)friends and family members, (2)recruiters from the university, (3)faculty members from previous institutions, (4)catalogues, and (5)other sources.

The second hypothesis was tested by a chi-square test of independence for a 3x4 (3 levels of previous universities by 4 levels of met expectations) contingency table. The three levels of previous universities were (1)small, (2)medium, and (3)large. The four levels of met expectations are represented above.

The final hypothesis was tested in two parts: first, by a chi-square test of independence for a 2x4 (2 levels of other universities considered by 4 levels of met expectations) contingency table, and second, by a chi-square test of independence for a 3x4 (3 levels of tradeoffs by 4 levels of met expectations) contingency table. The two levels of other universities considered were (1)yes, and (2)no while the three levels of tradeoffs were (1)yes, (2)no, and (3)not applicable. Once again, the four levels of met expectations are represented above.

RESULTS

The first hypothesis suggested that those students receiving pre-entry information from an informal source would perceive more

of their expectations were met than those students receiving pre-entry information from a formal source. This hypothesis was tested by a chi-square test of independence for four levels of met expectations by five levels of information sources.

Insert Table 1 about here

Results of the chi-square were not significant (x^2=10.50, df=12, p<.57). Cell frequencies are reported in Table 1. Consequently, hypothesis 1 was rejected.

The second hypothesis stated that those students receiving previous degrees from similar universities would perceive more of their expectations were met than those students receiving degrees from dissimilar institutions. Hypothesis 2 was tested by a chi-square test of independence for four levels of met expectations by three levels of previous universities.

Insert Table 2 about here

Results of the chi-square were not significant (x^2=6.95, df=6, p<.33). Cell frequencies are reported in Table 2. Therefore, hypothesis 2 was rejected.

Finally, the third hypothesis proposed that those students who examined and evaluated alternative universities prior to actually enrolling in the university would perceive more of their expectations were met than those students not doing so. Hypothesis 3 was tested by a chi-square test of independence for four levels of met expectations by two levels of other universities considered

and by a chi-square test of independence for four levels of met expectations by three levels of tradeoffs.

Insert Table 3 and Table 4 about here

Results of the two chi-squares were not significant (x^2=3.04, df=3, p<.39; x^2=9.67, df=6, p<.14). Cell frequencies are reported in Tables 3 and 4. Thus, hypothesis 3 was rejected.

In addition, a supplementary chi-square test of independence for five levels of information sources by three levels of satisfaction was used.

Insert Table 5 about here

Results of the chi-square were not significant (x^2=10.44, df=8, p<.24). Cell frequencies are reported in Table 5.

DISCUSSION

That each of the three hypotheses was rejected is quite interesting because the results appear to contradict previous organizational research. Even though the retrospective nature of this data definitely places a limit on its generalizability, it is unusual that the results from this study appear to completely deny prior studies, for example, on formal versus informal sources.

In the present study, formal sources of information included such official publications as university handbooks and catalogues or correspondence from locater services; these sources differed from the informal sources in that the formal ones included

no personal contact between individuals. The informal sources, on the other hand, included any personal contact between individuals; thus such sources as friends, family, recruiters, and faculty members from the prior institution might be considered informal. Although one would expect that interpersonal modes of conveying information would be far more effective, results from this study indicate otherwise. For example, of the 55 (76.4%) students who indicated that their post-entry perceptions were very similar, similar, or moderately similar to their pre-entry expectations, 19 (26.4%) of these were students who had received information solely from formal sources. In fact, only one individual (1.4%) who had dissimilar pre-entry expectations, had received information from a formal source.

Perhaps one explanation for the results seen here is that the expectations expressed by the students were primarily academically oriented (as opposed to socially and communicatively oriented) and were in tangible areas which could be verified by reading catalogues. Such information as that concerning university facilities, requirements of academic programs, and financial assistance are areas of content which can be readily transferred through written means. On the other hand, expectations regarding the communicative climate in such areas as the amount of "friendliness" among black students on campus and the amount of feedback received from professors, were at a minimum.

Another possible explanation is that graduate students, particularly those at the Ph.D. level, have reasonably precise perceptions of graduate school when they enter the program, regardless of the university. Thus, students at this level, regardless of the

source of information, might have relatively accurate perceptions of the university. An analysis of the extent to which Ph.D. students have more of their expectations met than M.A. students, or the extent to which graduate students have more of their expectations met than undergraduate students might, in fact, signify an important area for further research.

The preceding discussion may provide, at least a partial explanation, for the rejection of the second hypothesis. If indeed students have become oriented to graduate school through prior programs, the size of the university, like the information source, may be of minimal importance. Thus, graduate students enrolled in Ph.D. programs, regardless of whether they had graduated from a small, medium, or large university, would have more realistic expectations and would, hence, perceive that more of their expectations were met.

Interestingly enough, even though hypothesis 2 was rejected, the forestated contention might, in fact, find some support empirically, for less post-decision dissonance would be encountered since experience as graduate students would have taught them what to expect. This would have accounted for the fact that some 76.4% of all students surveyed perceived that their pre-entry expectations were very similar, similar, or moderately similar to their actual experiences, while only 33.3% of these had actually graduated from a large university.

Finally, hypothesis 3 was rejected. Essentially, the data seemed to indicate no correlation between the extent to which other universities were examined and tradeoffs were weighed, and the degree to which expectations were met. Overall, this study

revealed that, of the students interviewed, the majority (68.1%) was happy, with a lesser number (27.8%) being ambivalent, and an even smaller number being unhappy (4.2%). It seems that these students have undergone a self-selection process and that they essentially know what to expect as they enter the university. As a result, having chosen to attend this institution, they view the university as being attractive (i.e.cognitive dissonance theory).

Thus, it seems that sources of information, similarity of institutional size, examination of alternative institutions, and weighing tradeoffs may not be as important as determinants of the degree to which expectations are met as hypothesized. Although these variables should, of course, be considered, they apparently, are not all-encompassing, and other variables should be considered in addition. To see, for example, is Ph.D. students perceive that more of their expectations were met than M.A. students or if graduate students perceive more of their expectations were met than undergraduate students, would constitute additional areas of investigation for the researcher.

Therefore, this study has seemed to indicate that informal, as opposed to formal means of communicating information, are not necessarily more precise. Much of this is determined obviously by the type of information sought. If the desired information is indeed concrete and tangible, the formal sources may be just as accurate and informative as informal sources. Moreover, it seems that similar experiences might, in reality,form a more solid foundation upon which expectations can be constructed.

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Footnotes

[1]Of the 120 black graduate students enrolled at this university during Fall, 1981, only 72 could be reached. The researcher was unable to contact the remaining students. The efforts by the researcher were met by such responses as wrong numbers, disconnected numbers, information indicating that the student had moved to another state, and information indicating that the student, in the case of a doctoral candidate, was working elsewhere though technically still a student.

[2]On the 5-point Likert type scale which measured the degree to which initial expectations coincided with present expectations, 1 was used to indicate expectations which were very similar while 5 was used to indicate expectations which were very dissimilar. On the 5-point Likert type scale which measured the degree to which the university accurately presented itself to potential students, 1 was used to indicate perceptions which were very accurate, and 5 was used to indicate perceptions which were very inaccurate.

Table 1

Contingency Table for Level of Met Expectations by Information Source

Information Source	Level of Met Expectations							
	Very Similar		Similar		Moderately Similar		Dissimilar	
	n	% of Total	n	%	n	%	n	%
Friend	3	4.2	7	9.7	5	6.9	6	8.3
Recruiter	3	4.2	1	1.4	3	4.2	4	5.6
Faculty	3	4.2	4	5.6	3	4.2	4	5.6
Catalogue	6	8.3	4	5.6	9	12.5	1	1.4
Other	2	2.8	1	1.4	1	1.4	2	2.8

Table 2

Contingency Table for Level of Met Expectations

by Size of Previous University

Previous University	Level of Met Expectations							
	Very Similar		Similar		Moderately Similar		Dissimilar	
	n	% of Total	n	%	n	%	n	%
Small	5	6.9	11	15.3	6	8.3	8	11.1
Medium	6	8.3	2	2.8	6	8.3	4	5.6
Large	6	8.3	4	5.6	9	12.5	5	6.9

Table 3

Contingency Table for Level of Met Expectations

by Levels of Other Universities

Other Universities	Level of Met Expectations: Very Similar		Similar		Moderately Similar		Dissimilar	
	n	% of Total	n	%	n	%	n	%
Yes	10	13.9	10	13.9	15	20.8	14	19.4
No	7	9.7	7	9.7	6	8.3	3	4.2

Table 4

Contingency Table for Level of Met Expectations

by Levels of Tradeoffs

Levels of Tradeoffs	Level of Met Expectations: Very Similar		Similar		Mod. Similar		Dissimilar	
	n	% of Total	n	%	n	%	n	%
Yes	9	12.5	7	9.7	15	20.8	12	16.7
No	1	1.4	3	4.2	0	0	3	4.2
Not applicable	7	9.7	7	9.7	6	8.3	2	2.8

Table 5

Contingency Table for Level of Satisfaction

by Information Source

Information Source	Level of Satisfaction					
	Happy		Unhappy		Other	
	n	% of Total	n	%	n	%
Friend	10	13.9	1	1.4	10	13.9
Recruiter	8	11.1	0	0	3	4.2
Faculty	11	15.3	0	0	3	4.2
Catalogue	16	22.2	2	2.8	2	2.8
Other	4	5.6	0	0	2	2.8